

# 1788: THE YEAR THAT DISASTER STRUCK

For 250 years - from 1538 until 1788 - the choir end of Hyde Abbey where Alfred and his family members lay buried - was gradually forgotten about. This all changed, however, in 1788 when the land was taken over by the county authorities as the site of a small local prison or 'bridewell'. The convicts

themselves were put to work digging the foundations and in doing so - or maybe in reburying materials from other parts of the site - they started to come across a number of subterranean graves from across the abbey site.

One observer, the local Catholic priest, Dr. Milner wrote:

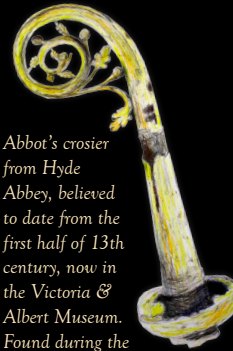
*"Miscreants couch amidst the ashes of our Alfreds and Edwards..... In digging for the foundations of that mournful edifice [the bridewell] at almost every stroke of the mattock or spade some ancient sepulchre was violated, the venerable contents of which were treated with marked indignity."*

## 'The bones thrown about'

The overseer of this horror was a man named Page (the Keeper of the bridewell). Ten years later Page was to provide a detailed account of what

happened in the area of the Royal graves (before the altar) to a visiting antiquary, Captain Henry Howard who drew up a rough plan of the east end of the church as a record of the lay-out. Subsequently Howard reported what he had been told:

*"A great stone coffin was found, cased with lead both within and without, and containing some bones and remains of garnets. The lead, in its decayed state, sold for two guineas; the bones were thrown about and the stone coffin broken into pieces. There were also two other coffins and no more found in this part, which were also broke for the sake of the garden in which they lay, broken up and buried as low as the spring."*



Abbot's crozier from Hyde Abbey, believed to date from the first half of 13th century, now in the Victoria & Albert Museum. Found during the excavations of 1788.

This was the critical point when the Royal bones - along with many others - were wrenched from the relative security of their graves, disarticulated and exposed to the rough elements.

So by the end of 1788 the royal bones were probably smashed in part, scattered and reburied to the level of the water-table. But exactly where was not clear.

Two carved stone capitals, 12th century, probably from the cloisters of Hyde Abbey. Now on display in the church of St. Bartholomew, Hyde. Photos: Sophie Cunningham Dawe.



Window glass from Hyde Abbey recently found by Wessex Archaeology. Image: Winchester Museums.



Tracery work from Hyde Abbey, re-cycled into the north wall of the church of St. Bartholomew, Hyde. Photo: Sophie Cunningham Dawe.